

China into the WTO pushes China in the right direction in all of these areas.

I, therefore, with this letter transmit to the Congress legislation authorizing the President to terminate application of Title IV of the Trade Act of 1974 to the People's Republic of China and extend permanent Normal Trade Relations treatment to products from China. The legislation specifies that the President's determination becomes effective only when China becomes a member of the WTO, and only after a certification that the terms and conditions of China's accession to the WTO are at least equivalent to those agreed to between the United States and China in our November 15, 1999, Agreement. I urge that the Congress consider this legislation as soon as possible.

William J. Clinton

The White House,
March 8, 2000.

Interview With Greta Van Susteren of CNN's Burden of Proof

March 8, 2000

Memphis Shootings

Ms. Van Susteren. Mr. President, thank you for joining us today. I want to first ask you your reaction—once again, this time Memphis, a fireman is dead, a police officer, and others. What's your reaction to this shooting?

The President. Well, as we're doing this interview, of course, we don't know all the facts, but it's a tragic thing for the city and for the families, because firemen and police, they put their lives on the line a lot, but they don't expect to be shot at the scene of a burning house. It's a terrible thing. And we just have to find the facts to know what happened and whether anything could have been done about it. It's very, very sad.

Michigan Shooting

Ms. Van Susteren. Another tragedy was the death of the 6-year-old, Kayla, in Michigan. And you met with her mother—

The President. I did.

Ms. Van Susteren. —this week in the White House. What did you tell her?

The President. Well, first of all, I told her that as a father I could only imagine her heartbreak, that there's nothing worse in life than having your child die before you, especially in tragic circumstances. And I told her I would do what I could to reduce the chances of it happening again. And I was very impressed with her. She and her husband, Kayla's stepfather, I think they really decided they're going to commit themselves to try to do things that will make the schools safer, the streets safer, the kids less vulnerable to this sort of thing. And we talked about some of the specific things we were working on.

Parental Responsibility for Gun Violence

Ms. Van Susteren. And one of the specific things is guns.

The President. Absolutely.

Ms. Van Susteren. When you talk about guns—besides being the President of the United States, you're a lawyer—do you think that the responsibility when a young child uses a gun and kills another child, that some of the responsibility may be cast in the direction of a parent or another adult? Should we hold them liable?

The President. I think if the custodial adult either knowingly or recklessly leaves a gun where a child can get a hold of it, then I think there should be some liability there. It's outrageous that this 6-year-old boy was able to get that gun. And of course, I think there ought to be child trigger locks on these guns. And I think that we should keep working until we develop the technology which will enable us to make handguns that can only be fired by the adults who own them, which is—it's not that far off.

I mean, the accidental gun death rate in America for children under 15 is 9 times higher than the rate of the next 25 countries combined. So, yes, I do. I think there ought to be some responsibility there, not if there's been a reasonable effort and the child finds a key and gets in a safe or something. But if there is—if it's just total irresponsibility or intentionally leaving a gun in a place where a child could easily get it, I think they should be held responsible.

Ms. Van Susteren. Well, you use the words "knowingly and recklessly," and that standard, it seems to me, is so different. In

some parts of the country where people have lots of guns, the “knowingly and recklessly” standard is so much different from those who might be unfamiliar. How do we decide what’s “knowingly and recklessly”——

The President. Well, I think maybe if Congress wanted to legislate in this area—this is normally a State law area. And I offered Federal legislation in the post-Columbine era to deal with this. The Congress could have legislative history in which they could actually cite some examples of what in their view falls on one side of the line and what doesn’t. And I think that would be helpful. Or what the Congress could do, if they feel that the circumstances are different from State to State, is to give some incentives for the States to pass such legislation.

I think there are 17 States which have passed legislation that have some form of adult responsibility if children who are below the age of responsibility get guns. But I don’t know whether they’re identical language or not. There are two different ways you could do that.

Gun Control Legislation

Ms. Van Susteren. You’ve been battling the gun—trying to get gun legislation for some time, and it seems to be a little bit of a logjam on Capitol Hill. Where’s the dispute? Why can’t legislation get passed?

The President. Well, I think the main source of dispute now is over closing the gun show loophole. That is, a lot of these—predominantly, the Republican Members of the House, although not all of them, are reluctant to close the gun show loophole. And a huge number of the Republicans in the Senate, although not everyone, 90 percent of them don’t want to close the gun show loophole. That is, they don’t want to require people at these gun shows and urban flea markets to have to do the same background checks on people who buy guns there, as gun store owners do, and people who buy guns there. And I just think they’re dead wrong.

When we passed the Brady bill, 7 years ago now, almost 7 years ago, the NRA and their sympathizers said, “Well, the Brady bill won’t do any good because criminals don’t buy guns at gun stores.” Well, it turns out 500,000 people couldn’t get guns because

they had a record as a felon, a fugitive, or a stalker.

So now we ought to go to the huge number of people who do buy them at these gun shows and urban flea markets, which is exactly what the NRA said they did 7 years ago. But now that we’re trying to get background checks there, all of a sudden they don’t want to do it.

So I think it’s very important to do. Now, there is some chance of a compromise because Representative John Conyers from Michigan and Chairman Henry Hyde from Illinois have talked back and forth about whether there was a way to close the gun show loophole that the Republicans would let get out of the conference committee, and then we could pass it. And I urged them to work on that yesterday. But I think that’s the biggest problem.

Ms. Van Susteren. When I look at this loophole, it seems to me—correct me if I’m wrong—is that one side wants 72 hours to do the background check, and one side says, no, 24 hours. Is that the dispute, 24 versus 72?

The President. Well, not exactly. That’s only part of it, and I’ll explain that. But there is also the question of what records will be checked and what you do with the people who can’t be checked within 24 hours. That is, John Conyers offered a 24-hour background check to Mr. Hyde. That is, the Democrats offered to the Republicans a 24-hour background check as long as there were some provision for holding roughly 5 to 8 percent of the applications that can’t be cleared in 24 hours.

That is, believe it or not, over 70 percent of these background checks are done within a matter of an hour. Over 90 percent are done within 24 hours. But a small percentage cannot be done. And in that small percentage, the people that are likely to be rejected are—20 times the rate of rejections in the last 5 percent as in the first 95 percent. So there’s a reason for holding those that can’t be checked when the records aren’t there.

So I think if we can work out something to do with the other 5 percent, we could agree to 95 percent of the people to have

a 24-hour waiting period. It's going to be interesting to see whether they will engage us in good faith on that.

Ms. Van Susteren. So what can we do with that 5 percent? What's your idea?

The President. Well, you enable them to—you give the 72 hours for that 5 percent. And if they're at a rural gun show and they don't know what to do because they want to buy the gun and the gun dealer has got to leave and go on to another place, they should just consummate the sale and have to deposit the gun at the local sheriff's office. And then if it clears, they get their gun. And if it doesn't clear, the gun dealer gets his gun back.

Ms. Van Susteren. In my prior life as a criminal defense lawyer, I had to represent a lot of people who used guns in murders, armed robberies, and I've got to tell you, I don't think any one of them bought it at a gun show or a gun shop. What about those people? What can we do about them?

The President. Well, I think there is no clear and easy answer. What we know is that some of this happens there because we've got—the gun death rate is at a 30-year low. So we know we're doing some good with the Brady bill, and we know we'll do some more good with this. And we also know that a lot of these guns are passed among criminals or sold out of a trunk by somebody alone that wouldn't be covered by the gun show law.

I think what you have to do there is just do a better job of checking people for guns, and if you find somebody—if we do all this and you still find people with unauthorized guns, they have to be punished for that.

I still believe—I would go further. I think that people who buy handguns would have to pass a Brady background check and a safety check and be licensed. I think we ought to license handgun owners the way we license car drivers. I think that will make a difference over the long run.

The other thing I would say is, you've got over 200 million guns in this country. Now, that's slightly overstating the case in terms of the danger, because a huge number of them are in the hands of collectors who are perfectly law-abiding, who have the guns very well secured. And a lot of them are in

the hands of hunters, who are law-abiding and have their guns well secured.

But one of the things that I have advocated is a big expansion of the gun buy-back program, because in the places where that's occurred, it's done some good—where you must give people money to bring in their guns, and then you melt them or destroy them otherwise. And I noted just today—I was just stunned to hear that there are a number of Republicans in the House of Representatives that want to stop us from doing the gun buyback program. I can't imagine why they want to stop that.

A lot of cities with Republican mayors have done gun buyback programs. And it's totally voluntary: You bring a gun in; you get a certain amount of money; you gather the guns up; and you destroy them. You're taking that many out of circulation. So those are the kinds of things I think ought to be done.

President's History With Guns

Ms. Van Susteren. Do you have a gun? Have you ever owned one or shot one?

The President. Oh, absolutely. I have owned hunting weapons. I've been given—I've never bought a pistol. I've been given pistols by the State police and others, and I've never kept them. I've never kept a gun in my residence. I've always kept them under secure circumstances outside the house when Chelsea was a little girl coming up and all that. But I have owned guns. And I first—I guess the first gun I had was a .22 when I was 12. I still remember shooting cans off fenceposts in the country with a .22 when I was 12. And I've hunted on and off all my life, not a great deal. I have bad ears, so I would be careful how many times a year I'd go hunting.

But I understand this culture. I've been a part of it. And I was Governor of a State for a dozen years where half of the people had hunting licenses. But I do not think it is right for people who are law-abiding to prevent the passage of these laws that will plainly save lives. I mean, you know, it's no big deal for people who are gun owners or people who are handgun owners to have to undergo a background check. And if it's a minor inconvenience for them to wait a little

bit, it's worth it to save people's lives. We now have evidence that it saves lives.

Nobody complains about going through airport metal detectors anymore, even if they have to go through 2 or 3 times, because they know it saves lives. People don't say we ought to repeal every speed limit or—you could say, "Well, most car drivers are law-abiding, so let's just stop licensing car drivers. Let's stop giving them driver's license tests, because most of them are law-abiding." Well, there would be an uproar if you did that.

So we should do more without eroding law-abiding gun owners' rights to hunt or sport shooting. We should do more to protect ourselves as a community, a lot more. We're the only country in the world that's not doing more, and we've got the death rates to show it. And if we want to save lives, we're going to have to continue to do more. We've got the lowest crime rate in 25 years because we've done more. And we've got to be better. We've got to do more.

Michigan Shooting

Ms. Van Susteren. Taking a look at what happened last week, if you had the legislation that you want, or if we had the legislation the Republicans want, Kayla would still be dead. The legislation wouldn't have prevented that gun from getting into that young boy's hands.

The President. No, but if you had adult responsibility legislation that was clear and unambiguous, at least people would think about it; guys like that would think about it. Even if—suppose this was a drug house, like they say—also, depending on how old these guns are, they would come with child trigger locks if you required them for all gun sales, prospectively. And I'm not at all sure that even a callous, irresponsible drug dealer with a 6-year-old kid in the house wouldn't leave a child trigger lock on a gun.

Gun Control Legislation

Ms. Van Susteren. Which raises the other question. Trigger locks are for guns that are from this day forward. What do we do with these millions of guns that are already out there?

The President. One of the things I think we ought to look at is see how you retrofit

them, where we could sell them, what we should do with them. And I'm just—if I could pass this, then I'd start looking at what to do with the guns that are out there now, whether we could get trigger locks for them and how we'd do it.

Right now, I've been waiting—we've been waiting 8 months. Columbine happened almost a year ago. Then the Senate passed a bill; the House passed a much weaker bill. We've been waiting 8 months for these people to get together with the Senate and the House and come up with a bill and send it to me.

And so, I've always tried to focus dealing with the Congress not just on what I thought was ideal but on what we would actually achieve. And I think every American now knows that the intense lobbying of the NRA and the other gun groups has had a profound impact on the House and on the Republican caucus in the Senate. But still, there are some people who are brave enough to stand up against it and to do reasonable things. So let's get this done, and then let's see where we go.

Ms. Van Susteren. I spoke to a representative of the NRA today who said that last summer, they had completely agreed on the bill in Congress, but that it was the Democrats and the White House that felt that the legislation in the House should be aborted. Is that right?

The President. No, they agreed on the House bill because it didn't do anything to close the gun show loophole. They didn't want—we've got to close the gun show loophole. We feel we do. I think they would come along now with child trigger locks. I think they would, and I know they support the custodial parent being held responsible when there's an egregious act there of intentional or reckless—allowing a child to have a gun. And I appreciate that.

I think they support more gun prosecutors and law enforcement officials, and I appreciate that. I don't know where they are—maybe they would go along with the banning of the large ammunition clips. They've never been for that before, but they might be for that. But their new, big, bottom line is we must never, ever, ever do a background

check on somebody at a gun show unless you can do it in 30 seconds or something.

I don't mind going to 24 hours, as long as you've got an escape hatch for the people you can't clear in 24 hours because I'll say again, they are 20 times more likely to be turned down, that small percentage of people, than the general population that we can clear in 24 hours.

Ms. Van Susteren. One final question. The Vice President wants—or has suggested that we have photo licensing. What is your reaction to that?

The President. I think it's a good idea.

Ms. Van Susteren. Why?

The President. Because I think that it will establish a nexus between—first of all, to get a license, you ought to have to pass a safety course and the Brady background check. I think that's good. And I think then it will be easier to track the guns. We're trying to develop technology to track all guns and all bullets used in crimes and ultimately get them back to where they started. And I think for that reason—for crime control reasons and for safety reasons, it would be a good thing to do.

Just like with licensed drivers, I think it's a community safety requirement that we ought to do. I think he's absolutely right about it. And there's not a good argument not to do it.

Ms. Van Susteren. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. Thank you.

NOTE: The interview began at 5:30 p.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. In his remarks, the President referred to 6-year-old Kayla Rolland, who was shot and mortally wounded by a 6-year-old classmate in Mount Morris Township, MI; and her mother and stepfather, Veronica and Michael McQueen. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Message to the Congress Transmitting the National Money Laundering Strategy for 2000

March 8, 2000

To the Congress of the United States:

As required by the provisions of section 2(a) of Public Law 105-310 (18 U.S.C.

5341(a)(2)), I transmit herewith the National Money Laundering Strategy for 2000.

William J. Clinton

The White House,
March 8, 2000.

Remarks on Medicare Prescription Drug Benefit Legislation and an Exchange With Reporters

March 9, 2000

The President. Thank you very much. Good morning. Thank you, Senator Daschle. Thank you, Senator Akaka, Senator Breaux, Senator Bryan, Senator Dorgan, Senator Sarbanes, and Senator Wyden, for joining us today. And thank you, Secretary Shalala, for the leading role you've played in the development of our proposal to provide a voluntary prescription drug benefit for seniors under Medicare.

Minimum Wage Legislation

I want to make a few comments on Senator Daschle's very fine statement and the principles he outlined. But first I'd like to say a word about another debate going on in the House today over the minimum wage. Once again, the Republican leadership has derailed what should be a simple vote on the minimum wage, with a maximum of political maneuvering. The vote is yet to be taken, but we all know the results are already in. The special interests will win, and the national interests will wait.

We will raise the minimum wage but not with the Republican bill that stacks the deck against our workers. It is loaded with poison pills that penalize workers and with risky tax cuts that threaten our prosperity and the future of Social Security and Medicare.

The combined actions of the majority in the House and the Senate on all their tax cuts is now far in excess of what I have recommended and in excess of what we can afford and still pay down the debt and reform Social Security and Medicare and continue to invest in education.

Congress should send me a bill I can sign, not one I'll have to veto, a clean, straightforward bill that raises the minimum wage by a dollar over 2 years. If you remember